

Remarks at International Young Alumni Conference
Ambassador Richard Olson
April 13, 2013
National Library Auditorium, Islamabad

Sameena Imtiaz, National President of the Pakistan-U.S. Alumni Network;
All of our young alumni from throughout Pakistan, and our alumni visitors from India and Afghanistan – thank you all for coming. It is an honor to be with you all here today.
Our five American undergraduate visitors – this is the first time in over ten years that American undergraduates have traveled to Pakistan through a university exchange program. It is an honor to welcome you here.

Assalamu Alaikum

Tonight is a celebration. Over the past three days, you have come together to discuss the role that young people should play in their communities, in their countries, and in the world.

You have discussed social entrepreneurship, and how to build lasting programs and networks that will bring positive change. And you have made new friends who will form a support system upon which you can continuously rely. I am proud of the work you have done at this conference, and look forward to hearing about the progress you will make in the coming months and years.

The theme of this week's conference is "The Faces of Change, the Changes We Face." There is no doubt that your generation faces great challenges and will see many changes.

But your generation also has greater resources at its disposal than ever before. Many of you are the first in your families to receive a university education, and certainly many of you are the first in your family travel to the United States.

Technology and the Internet allow you to have greater access to information and networks, which you can use to build stronger community service projects and to find international partners with whom you can work. Some of the world's problems can be solved through innovation – through citizens compelled to make a difference in their communities.

Your creative thinking and hard work has the potential to unlock shared economic prosperity and development, and we are committed to supporting your efforts. I hope that many of you will apply to our Alumni Small Grants program to receive seed funding to put your social enterprise ideas into practice.

The people in the room today are the future leaders of South Asia. Work together to find creative, innovative solutions to the regional challenges you will face.

The U.S. Embassy has decided to form a youth council here in Pakistan so we can hear directly from you incorporate your good ideas into our Embassy programs.

I am inspired by the stories of our alumni like Farman Ullah. Farman Ullah grew up in FATA's Mohmand Agency and attended our Global UGrad exchange program in 2011.

During his semester at Lincoln University of Missouri, he learned about community service, human rights, and civic responsibility. He credits these lessons with a newfound desire to work in his community to try to alleviate the poverty that many residents experience.

When he returned to FATA, he began working as a volunteer with the Sarhad Rural Support Programme, one of the largest development organizations working in KP and FATA. He now works to provide basic goods, shelter, infrastructure improvements, and professional training to his own neighborhood.

If some think that young people cannot make a difference in their communities, I would ask them to speak with Farman Ullah.

When I look into this audience, I know that each of you has impressive talents. Each of you represents the future of your countries. I am proud that my country has had a role in your education and helped your countries, one student at a time.

We often hear of the difficulties in the relationship between the United States and countries in South Asia. When I look around at you, I see how much we have in common: love of education, service to our communities, friendship. It is these common threads that will help us build better relationships among our countries and our peoples.

We see this demonstrated today in the five American students from the University of Massachusetts who are here with us. These students welcomed many of you to the United States and into their families.

Now they are here to learn firsthand about your countries. In teaching them about your culture, first in the United States and now here in Islamabad, you created long-lasting friendships.

In closing, I have a message to all the young alumni in the audience. Your countries need you to make them better places. Continue with your studies and the important community service work you are doing.

Whether you are in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, or the United States, devote your time and energy to making your country the country you want it to be. While the challenges you face will be large, we will continue to support you as you do even greater things in the future. I look forward to learning about your successes.

With that, I will not keep us from tonight's big event – a concert by Pakistani alumni of our Center Stage, One Beat, and International Visitor Leadership Programs.

Thank you for your attention. Khuda Hafez.